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LA AUTO SHOW

CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH

PANNING FOR THE LA SHOW'S BEST

Q WHAT WILL THE 2015 LOS ANGELES AUTO SHOW be remembered for? A Fiat. No, we don't mean the Fiat 500 Stormtrooper spec, though some will remember that. We're talking the Fiat 124 Spider's return; Mazda builds it on the Miata platform. We'll also remember Honda's new Civic coupe, promising to revive the Import Scene (Honda says), and Alfa caused a stir just showing the powerful Giulia Quadrifoglio's U.S. specs. Then we all had a latte. *Ciao, baby!*

RANGE ROVER

■ Few automakers have made a convertible SUV. Nonetheless, here comes Range Rover's Evoque convertible. This is not Land Rover's first rodeo with a convertible; in fact, its first-ever truck, launched in 1948, was roofless. Why do a convertible again? Land Rover calculates the global SUV market is set to grow 20 percent over the next five

years and figures the latest Evoque will be a player.

The company promises the latest has Range Rover refinement, can go off-road like a real Land Rover and has a rock-solid structure. How rock solid? Land Rover claims it's actually stiffer than the three-door Evoque, thanks to more than 600 pounds of floor bracing and windshield-frame strengthening.



KYLE BURT (2)

Meanwhile, the convertible uses the Evoque's 2.0-liter, 240-hp turbo four, nine-speed automatic and Terrain Response system. The power roof stows in 18 seconds and can operate up to 30 mph; when it's closed, a layer of acoustic insulation keeps noise levels down. The rollover protection system, hidden in the rear bodywork, deploys two aluminum bars in 90 milliseconds.

The big deal inside is the new 10.2-inch touchscreen with Jaguar Land Rover's next-generation InControl Touch Pro system; it offers smartphone integration and is available with door-to-door navigation, Wi-Fi and a rockin' stereo system.

Look for the convertible next summer in SE Dynamic and HSE Dynamic trim levels, with prices starting at \$52,465.

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START



BUICK

■ Buick says its Avenir concept introduced in January in Detroit inspired the 2017 LaCrosse's lower, wider shape. It definitely looks more modern and stylish; it's also 300

pounds lighter. The wheels are pulled forward almost 3 inches, overall length grows 0.6 inch and the roofline is 1.6 inches lower. A new version of GM's 3.6-liter V6 makes 305 hp and 268 lb-ft. Power goes

to the front or all wheels through an eight-speed automatic. Suspension is a five-link in the rear and a MacPherson setup in front, while electronic continuous damping is optional, adjusting every two milliseconds.

FIAT

■ The 124 Spider looks suspiciously like a Miata because, well, under the skin it is: Mazda and Fiat collaborated on the project. The Fiat has its own sheet-metal, with a hexagonal grille, round headlights, horizontal taillights and power domes on the hood. Fiat's own turbocharged

MultiAir 1.4-liter four (160 hp, 184 lb-ft borrowed from the 500 Abarth) is coupled with either a six-speed manual or automatic sending power to the rear wheels. Pricing is expected closer to launch next summer, though it shouldn't be too far off a Miata. So expect it to start around \$25,000.



KYLE BURT (3)

HONDA

■ We saw the 10th-generation Civic coupe in concept form last spring at the New York show; LA brought us the production car.

From the front to the top of the windshield, it's the Civic sedan; from the top of the A-pillar back,

it's all coupe.

The roofline is an inch lower than the sedan and the rear overhang is 5.5 inches shorter.

The coupe uses the sedan's 2.0-liter four (158 hp, 138 lb-ft) and 1.5-liter turbo four (174 hp, 162 lb-ft). It goes on sale in March.



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START



LINCOLN

■ The 2017 MKZ is the first car to drop Lincoln's split-wing grille; it has a rectangular design similar to the Continental concept's. The MKZ is on sale next summer and also introduces an optional Lincoln-exclusive 400-hp 3.0-liter turbo V6. The base engine is a carryover 2.0-liter four, while the gas-electric hybrid option remains. Inside, Lincoln eliminated the touch-sensitive sliders for audio and climate controls, returning to buttons and knobs.

MAZDA

■ The next-generation CX-9 three-row crossover moves to the Skyactiv powertrain and chassis as part of its first overhaul since its 2007 intro. With Mazda's curvy Kodo design language, the CX-9

borrows from the Mazda 6's long front overhang and sloped fastback roofline. The CX-9's 2.5-liter turbo produces 250 hp at 5,000 rpm and 310 lb-ft at a down-low 2,000 revs. The car is due in showrooms next spring.



MERCEDES-BENZ

■ The 2017 SL has new front-end sheetmetal, a more powerful V6 and a new nine-speed transmission.

The new grille, subtle power domes in the hood and wider

LED headlamps bring the look more in line with the AMG GT. The V6's output in the SL450 is up 34 hp to 362.

The SL550 and SL63's power and torque will stay the same.

SUBARU

■ Following the 2017 Impreza hatch concept's Tokyo show debut, we got the sedan concept in LA. The 2017 Impreza is the first car on Subaru's new global architecture. Subaru just revamped the Impreza/WRX/STI engine family, so we're guessing the Impreza continues with a 2.0-liter, 148-hp four and all-wheel drive. WRX and STI have turbo fours making either 268 hp or 305 hp.



KYLE BURT (4)



HOW TO SAVE ROAD RACING

THIS YEAR, I WENT TO THE Monaco Grand Prix. A couple weeks later, I watched the 24 Hours of Le Mans on the Internet. Of course, over the years, I have been to a lifetime of races, everything from IndyCar and Formula One to the Deutsche Tourenwagen Meisterschaft and what used to be called World Sports-Prototype Championship. So, I like road racing, and I'm guessing you do, too.

The problem is, few others seem to like it. Why? Well, I think the biggest reason is, there is little actual racing. Winners are decided by pit-stop strategies, and no one wants to see that. Yawn. Snore. Gack. Road racing as a sport of consequence is dying. But fear not, I have a simple solution: wider turns. More room. Elbow room to set up your man and then dive-bomb him into oblivion around turn three, just so he can then set you up and dive-bomb you in turn four.

Anybody remember Burke Lakefront Airport in Cleveland, home of the Grand Prix of Cleveland? Of course you do. Many of you attended the race, many more watched on TV. Sure, the circuit was bumpy as heck and obviously just thrown together on an airport for the once-a-year event. But you know what Cleveland had? It had wide-open corners. I remember watching Emmo and Mansell duking it out for the lead in Cleveland. One would pass the other, then get passed in the next corner. What year was that? Who cares? It was racing!

There was room to try a different line, to wend your way outside and then suddenly cut back, using the setup talent God gave you to outperform your foe.

This leads to my brilliant solution: Most tracks could easily and cheaply accommodate a little more pavement in their corners, add some more room. I was just at Road America awhile ago, for instance, and in between the storied straights of that great track, the corners could easily be made wider. Several were right-angle affairs—excusable on a street



Above: Drivers go into a corner during the '03 Grand Prix of Cleveland. Inset: An aerial view of the Burke Lakefront Airport circuit.

LAT PHOTOGRAPHIC (2)

course but not so much when you have all the room the wilds of central Wisconsin offer. Same with most of your favorite local road courses—wouldn't you want more room to maneuver in the corners? Of course you would!

I don't mean to pick on Road America or any track in particular—almost any road course in the world could add several hundred square feet of pavement at most of its corners, and suddenly you'd have real racing instead of pit-stop strategies. Why not put the action out on the track where it belongs? Who's with me? Fire up the pavers! Let's go!

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CAROLINA IN OUR MIND



Marriott Vacation property. We also followed Pixar's Jay Ward as he gave a tour through the GMC-sponsored "Life in the Suburbs" exhibit on the show grounds; his knowledge about life in the 1950s and '60s (and the vehicles that made America great) was deep and fascinating.

Finally, Mandel spent time with GMC chief exterior designer Matthew Noone talking about the style and design excellence on the show lawn, as well as why it was a fitting locale for myriad GMC vehicles on display. Mint julep, anyone?

AUTOWEEK recently spent quality time in the South Carolina Low-country at the Hilton Head Island Motoring Festival & Concours d'Elegance. Not only did publisher Dutch Mandel perform duties as a guest judge, Autoweek joined

forces with the Marriott Vacation Club to present Jim Benson of Greer, SC, the coveted helmet trophy for his 1954 Plymouth Belvedere Suburban as the car the editors wanted to take on vacation.

Also part of Jim's prize: A week's stay at a



EDITOR'S PICK 'FORD TOTAL PERFORMANCE'

■ In "Ford Total Performance," Martyn L. Schorr takes a look at the Blue Oval's metamorphosis in the 1960s from a company more focused on safety to one concerned with exciting the emotions of baby boomers coming of age. Follow Lee Iaccoca as he convinced Henry Ford II ("the Deuce") that Ford should ignore the U.S. manufacturer ban on factory racing and take on the best in the world at the 24 Hours of Le Mans and beyond. The book highlights the

427 Fairlane Thunderbolt, Shelby Cobra, Mercury Comet, Falcon, Boss 302 and 429 Mustangs, Le Mans-winning GT40 and more.

"Ford Total Performance," Martyn L. Schorr, hardbound, 208 pages, Motorbooks, \$32.75, amzn.to/1Hi1LSa
—JAKE LINGEMAN

REVVED UP

"Pages of Gauges,"
Car Life, Murilee
Martin, Nov. 9

Funny coincidence regarding the Nov. 9 edition with the article about the JC Whitney catalogue (there should be a book about that catalogue!). I used to get JC Whitney too, loved looking through

all the different items and illustrations; it was the go-to source for chrome swan hood ornaments with wings that lit up, ahooga horns and curb feelers. The funny connection is that, of all the thousands of ads that were in that catalogue, the clipped-out newsprint ad you chose—"Car Stereo Disguises"—happens to be an old drawing of mine. In high school and college, I helped out at my mom's typesetting and graphic design shop. I did a lot of ads and "paste-ups" and learned a ton. A local guy designed and manufactured that product—it was called Incognito—and he needed art for his new packaging. I did the artwork. I remember that it needed to have a dial on the radio cover, so I "set" the dial to the left end where my favorite college stations were located. JC Whitney sold that item and used the illustration from the package for the catalogue. Thanks for the reminder of that funky and fantastic old catalogue ... and life long before Pixar.

Bob Pauley, production designer for Pixar on "Cars," among other movies, via email



"Autonomous Autos: They Might Save Lives,"
Talking About Cars, Jay Leno, Nov. 9

Yes, autonomous cars may save lives, but how much freedom will we have to sacrifice to attain that safety? As ol' Ben Franklin once said, "Those who would give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety."

Michael LeClair, Victor, New York



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A TRUE SHOWPIECE: GMC

Where Precision Meets Elegance and Style

MUST A CAR show that cascades on a verdant fairway be an unobtainable, snooty affair that only highlights unobtainable, snooty automotive art? Or can it celebrate style and design for all?

That's what the Hilton Head Motoring Festival and Concours d'Elegance does—embrace the casual and genteel vibe of this South Carolina coastal community.

This concours does not affect airs. It embodies old-world charm wrapped in a bucolic setting, where the art of Southern graciousness tips a hat to all.

For these reasons and more, GMC chose to stake a claim at this up-and-coming national event. An odd choice? Not at all: Craftsmanship and attention to detail define every GMC vehicle—from its award-win-

ning, midsize Canyon pickup truck to the full-size Yukon Denali XL. No GMC is out of place on a show-of-elegance lawn. The surrounding area's cozy and cossetting nature is very much a trait that GMC shares.

Indeed, Matt Noone should know a good thing when he sees it, and he did at Hilton Head. Noone, GMC's director of exterior design, praised the show and saw it as an ideal showcase for his work. "GMC is understated luxury—it is not in your face," Noone said, "and that's what we have here." It did not take Noone long to make this observation, as it was his first-ever visit to the Lowcountry.

While there, Noone shared his thoughts on GMC's design ethos and its influences. The wide-ranging conversation also covered GMC's position in the broader



new-car market and some enticing ideas about the marque's future. With vintage GMC trucks on display, Noone made clear his mission is to create bodywork that evokes GMC's high standards of quality and incredible capability.

Many of the vehicles that populated the lawn at this year's Hilton Head Concours weren't designed with high-end car shows in mind, but

they ended up being beautiful anyway. Race cars, station wagons and work trucks look beautiful when they are the right tool for a given job. As GMC has proven over the course of its history, elegance is often found in honest, purposeful forms rather than those that are overtly ornamental. That's a tradition to which Noone and the team at GMC seem very much committed.

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HOLIDAY GIFT IDEAS FOR THE MOTOR-
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BY AARON SIGMOND

Whatever you celebrate—12 days of Christmas, eight of Hanukkah, seven of Kwanzaa or any combination hereof—there's just never enough time during the holidays. So what better gift to give others (or yourself) than a stylish motor-car-, motorsport- or motorcycle-inspired wristwatch to help keep track of it all?

AUTODROMO GROUP B RALLY RACING

Created to commemorate the Group B era of Rally racing (1982-1986), this eponymous watch has a Miyota 9015 automatic movement housed in a lightweight (52-gram) 39mm titanium capsule case with integral steel lugs. Comes in blue, red, white and yellow dial accents. \$925.



ARMIN STROM MULTIPLE GUMBALL 3000 COLLECTION

■ We've never had the chance to feature a Gumball Rally wristwatch or a timepiece from the boutique Swiss house Armin Strom, much less both—until now. Making up for (ahem) lost time, we have three models to recommend, including a manual-winding tourbillon in a limited edition of five. \$14,800 (Manual); \$30,400 (Double Barrel); \$155,000 (Tourbillon).



BAUME ET MERCIER CAPELAND SHELBY COBRA

■ There have been three other Shelby watch collaborations over the past decade (with David Yurman, March L.A.B and Anonimo)—and this latest pairing is a dandy (albeit slightly oversized at 44mm) that's powered by a Swiss LaJoux-Perret caliber 8147-2 automatic chronograph movement. \$4,450 (steel); \$19,950 (red gold).



BREITLING FOR BENTLEY GT3 CHRONOGRAPH

■ The Breitling for Bentley collection partnership is now in its 12th year. This latest holiday offering is a non-subtle nod (its black titanium case is an absurd 49mm) to the Continental GT3. The limited-edition chrono (500 pieces) is fitted with a carbon-fiber dial and rubber strap; it's powered by the Breitling Calibre 27B self-winding movement. \$11,850.




BRM V12-44-COR-03

■ BRM's latest collaboration is a Franco-American partnership with Corvette Racing to commemorate Team Corvette's win at the 24 Hours of Le Mans 2015. The V12-44-COR-03 automatic chrono comes in two versions (Car No. 63 and Car No. 64), each limited to 24 pieces. It's housed in a 44mm stainless-steel case accented with black PVD and a hand-painted yellow stripe. \$10,750.



MAURICE DE MAURIAC CHRONOGRAPH MODERN

 Zurich-based Maurice de Mauriac wristwatches are fun, and the checkered-flag motif version of its Chronograph Modern—a 42mm steel-case sports watch on a NATO strap, powered by Valjoux ETA 77.50—is a prime example. MdM is also distinctive, though, in that each is made to order on the same principle as a bespoke suit or luxury European auto: Options abound, enabling you to hearp your preferences and modifications atop a base model. \$3,350.



HUBLOT BIG BANG FERRARI CARBON

■ The Hublot Big Bang just celebrated its 10th anniversary. Hublot has run the gamut of motorcar- and motorsport-inspired timepieces, but its Ferrari collection continues to run strong. This year's models include the Big Bang Ferrari Carbon King Gold (pictured) and the Big Bang Ferrari Titanium Carbon, both of which showcase the proprietary bi-material-fusion bezel of carbon and precious metals. \$28,600 (titanium); \$43,600 (King Gold).



TUDOR FASTRIDER CHRONOGRAPH

■ There are many noteworthy watches on this year's list—yet the Ducati-inspired Tudor Fastrider Chronograph might be the one you've been waiting for. Rolex's relaunch and reposition of its little brother brand has been astonishing; the striking moto-inspired 42mm steel case, 7753 self-winding mechanical movement, matte-black ceramic bezel with matte-finish yellow, green or red dial and PVD-treated steel pushers only underscore the point. \$4,100.



TAG HEUER CARRERA HEUER 01

■ The TAG Heuer Carrera is an iconic mid-20th-century chronograph—and as we edge deeper into the 21st, the just-released Carrera Heuer 01 offers a clear answer to "What's next?" Still inspired by racing, this watch has an all-new 45mm case, design and movement; the Calibre Heuer 01, a house-manufactured automatic chronograph with date movement is, the company notes, a "markedly horological development of the (previous) Calibre 1887." \$5,250.



TISSOT PR100 CHRONOMETER DANICA PATRICK 2015

■ This year, Tissot and its brand ambassador, NASCAR driver Danica Patrick, celebrate 10 years together, so Tissot has released the PR100 Chronometer Danica Patrick Limited Edition 2015, in 100 examples. The feminine sports watch with steel case and bracelet has a mother-of-pearl dial with numeral-set diamonds. A lovely timepiece—although given the occasion, a mechanical movement over the ETA quartz might have been a classier move. \$725.



MARKET **1984 CHEVROLET** **CAMARO Z28**

Morphy Auctions
 Denver, Pennsylvania
 Oct. 11, 2015

■ Black with black-and-gray cloth interior. 165-hp, "Cross Fire Injection" 5.0-liter V8; five-speed manual transmission. Single-owner vehicle with a reported 10,300 miles on the odometer. The paintwork looked as it likely did when this car left the factory, which, in 1984 was fairly good. The exterior trim was excellent.

Visually, this Z28 was 100 percent stock and original. Cloth interiors are not famous for wearing well without showing signs of age, but you could argue that this interior was better than expected at 10,000 miles. Underhood and underneath were both clean—we should all look this good and retain this level of originality after 31 years.



SOLD AT \$11,000

If you just happened to be in Denver, PA, on Oct. 11, had a bidding paddle and were wide awake, you should have bought this gently used Z28. Is an '84 Z28 a screaming hot performer? No, but this car was a screaming hot deal. Honest and original, a five-speed, great colors and even better condition. It would have been your choice to keep the miles low and retain the value,

or you could have just driven the wheels off it and sold it with 110,000 miles for a quarter (or more) of what you paid. Did we mention that is has great colors?

If you were somewhere around 10 years old in 1984, this just might have been the aspirational car you promised yourself you would get when you reached your 40s. Any way you slice it, this was a bitchin' price on a bitchin' Camaro.

—DAVE KINNEY



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THEY'RE ALL TURBOS NOW

Say hello
to Porsche's
heavily revised
Carrera 991.2

BY J.P. VETTRAINO



SOME CONTEMPORARY automobiles impress with speed and competence, but leave you wondering where the exhilaration

went. Others get you mistaken for a mobster or a pimp. A few can still scare the crap out of you.

Yet if you seek a high-performance road car that embodies enthusiast values and rationality, with a wash-and-wear quality suited for just about any climate, locale or purpose, we highly recommend a Porsche 911 Carrera. The 911 has balanced perfor-

mance, enthusiasm and good sense better, longer than any car that comes to mind—and that continues with the heavily revised 2017 Carreras.

Porsche Type 991 Gen 2 evolves from the 991 platform—the third all-new foundation in 51 years of 911s—that debuted as the 2012 911. For the second generation, the '17 Carreras are updated with standard adaptive suspension, optional rear steer, a revised PDK transmission and turbocharged engines across the line: Starting with these Carreras and moving forward through a dozen or so variants, all 911s

will have turbocharged engines.

Turbocharging has become the standard solution to government mandates to lower CO2 emissions—the way to reduce displacement, improve fuel-economy ratings and still deliver power increases. Even Ferrari has followed suit, and the holdouts grow fewer and farther between.

Porsche's changeover to turbo engines is easier in some respects, challenging in others. The 1975 911 Turbo was the first series-built sports car with pressure-regulated turbocharging, and it has evolved into its own brand. Four decades later, there are cars



with turbo engines, and there's the Turbo.

The new turbo engine's displacement shrinks to 3.0 liters—from 3.4 in the standard Carrera and 3.8 in the S. The boxer-six is revised throughout, with new metallurgy, Porsche's first composite oil pan, new heads, a fuel pump for each bank and still higher fuel pressure—up to 3,625 psi. Efficiencies have been squeezed from nearly every component, according to Porsche, including a clutch-operated water pump.

There's a BorgWarner turbo for each bank with a conventional fixed impeller, rather than more sophisticated variable-

geometry turbos used in the Turbo. The blowers measure 49mm in diameter on the Carrera engine, 51mm on the S. The only other differences are the model-specific exhaust and electronic mapping. The new 3.0 six makes 370 hp, 332 lb-ft in the Carrera; 420 hp, 370 lb-ft in the S.

That's up 20 hp, 45 lb-ft for both cars, compared to the larger naturally aspirated engines. Porsche says acceleration times are as much as 0.45 second quicker, and the Carrera now laps the Nordschleife a hair quicker than did the previous Carrera S. EPA numbers are pending, but in the EU

cycle, the new Carrera's fuel consumption has dropped 12 percent on average.

The seven-speed manual uses a new, twin-disc clutch, while Porsche's *Doppelkupplungsgetriebe*—the PDK dual-clutch automatic—has several efficiency enhancements. First is a dual-mass flywheel with a centrifugal pendulum, intended to reduce vibration and allow the engine to run at even lower rpm in higher gears.

Air-management plumbing is revised to feed the turbos and charge the coolers, and the 911 body gets a bit more aluminum. Porsche says weight increases



**2017 PORSCHE
911 CARRERA**
ON SALE: March 2016
BASE PRICE: \$90,395
DRIVETRAIN: 3.0-liter, 370-hp, 332-lb-ft turbocharged boxer-six; RWD, seven-speed manual
CURB WEIGHT: 3,153 lb
0-60 MPH: 4.0 sec
FUEL ECONOMY (EPA CITY/HWY/COMBINED): 22/31/25 mpg (est)

are measured in tens of pounds from Gen 1 to Gen 2. Styling updates start with larger grilles in the front valance (for engine-coolant radiators), fitted with louvers that open or close to balance cooling demands and aero efficiency. They end with vents in each corner of the rear bumper to dump air flowing through the intercoolers. In between are four DRL diodes fixed around the main projection headlights, reshaped mirrors and new door handles.

The list of changes doesn't end there: There is also revised suspension tuning, lower ride heights, bigger brakes, rear-steer borrowed from the Gen 1 GT3 and Turbo, new infotainment with a smartphone app, etc. Porsche has taken a page from Ferrari, putting a normal/sport/sport-plus dial on the steering wheel. It adds a push-to-pass button that sets all the electronics to full sport for 20 seconds.

Maybe because turbos have felt normal in a 911 for about 40 years, the '17 Carrera doesn't feel the least bit strange. There's nothing we'd call turbo lag and nothing to diminish the boxer's credentials as one the

sweetest, most satisfying engines extant. If anything, the range of satisfaction is broader, with more torque flowing near the low end. The eagerness to build revs remains, and there's no wheezing near the 7,500-rpm redline. A Gen 1 owner will be hard-pressed to find any distinction in power delivery, impressionistic impact or performance, except for the sound.

Yeah, these Carreras sound different but not unfamiliar. They sound like a Turbo, and aural splendor has never been a Turbo strength. To its credit, Porsche has added no digitized noise. You'll definitely hear the high-pitch whine of spinning turbos, particularly with the optional Sport exhaust. The primary difference from normally aspirated Carreras is the blending, muffling effect of turbocharging. It covers the whistling clatter of the flat-six with a more generic curtain of powerful sound.

Payoff? The answer requires ownership, a long-term test or at least EPA ratings for some sort of baseline. We'd guesstimate an increase of 2-3 EPA mpg, and that's nothing to scoff at.

The new Carreras retain the oft-maligned electrically boosted steering introduced in the 991 Gen 1, and after a good drive in Gen 2, we don't get the maligned. There are differences, maybe even shortcomings, compared to the 997; the most significant is a bit more numbness on center. Yet from there, the 991's steering is just fine, steadily building feedback as the front tires load. Turn-in feels as sharp as ever, with consistently accurate trajectory that allows the average hack to keep hitting marks, even when a bump wants to bounce the 911 away from an apex. Steering feel is a function of more than power assist—of shaft stiffness, geometry, suspension tuning and tires—and the 911's might be the best evolution of electric assist yet.

With a standard adaptive suspension and a bit more rear tire, the new Carreras retain that trademark 911 feel—call it a hint of tail heaviness, even though there is less mass behind the rear axle than ever. Handling is vice-free on the road, and there's so much lateral grip that the stability electronics are hard to find on dry pave-



ment. There's impressive structural integrity and enough isolation and suspension compliance that few will rue their choice of transport on decaying urban roadways. The ride is still firm at the softest damping rate—firm enough to induce a steady vibration in your belly fat on full washboard surfaces—but if that's a deal-breaker, you might think about something besides a sports car. It all comes in a package that has evolved well in the right ways.

We're left with Carreras that are a little faster and a little grippier. They should cost less to run and generate less CO₂, without significant payback, unless you consider turbo sound significant. What's not to like will be left for Luddites and flat-earth disciples to decide—the sorts who curse the day Porsche water-cooled the 911 or built the first Cayenne. Bottom line, the 911 has stayed as true to its values and defining character as any car, and that applies even with a full line of turbocharged engines.

Need some flat earth? For the tech and extra bit of speed and efficiency PDK delivers, the manual remains the way to go. It still feels most like a 911, by the sensations through the pedals and the way you feel power build, boxer style. You don't even have to shift much if you don't want to. The engine is so flexible, so amenable, that you can cover a range of 50 mph or so in second or third gear, with decent response that easily keeps with traffic. You can even lumber through corners with no shift.

We can thank the good ol' US of A for that. Here, where we invented the automatic and everyone buys one, the take rate for manual-transmission 911s is easily the highest in the world. Porsche execs concede that if it weren't for demand here, or the outcry that might follow the end of the clutch pedal, the 991 Gen 2 probably would not have a manual at all.

You can order your 2017 Carrera now—standard, S, coupe or cabriolet—with deliv-

eries expected by March. Base prices increase about \$5,000 from 2015. Carrera 4s and Targas roll out over the next six months, while the Gen 1 911 GTS, GT3 and Turbo will sell side by side with Gen 2s for the next year.

Those last two variants—the GT3 and Turbo—present the biggest quandary. The GT3 has always been sort of the anti-Turbo and might remain the only naturally aspirated 911. And now that they're all turbos, what will distinguish the ultimate 911, capital T? At this point, only Porsche knows, but the turbocharged Carreras offer an interesting perspective on four decades of 911 development nonetheless.

In 1975, the first 3.0-liter 911 Turbo generated 260 bhp and required 5.5 gallons of gas to cover 62 miles in the EU's cycle. The base 2017 3.0-liter Carrera makes 42 percent more horsepower and travels the same distance on a hair less than 2 gallons.

Chew on that, flat-earthers. 🍷



\\ 2017 MERCEDES-AMG C63 S COUPE

EXQUISITE COMPETENCE



STYLE, POWER, PERFORMANCE —
THE MERCEDES-AMG C63 S COUPE
BRINGS MORE OF EVERYTHING

BY GRAHAM KOZAK

QUOTE: THOUGH IT'S TOUGH TO PIN down when, exactly, it happened, at some point the market (or marketers) decided that luxury cars needed to be sports cars, too. Continent-devouring output wrapped in grand-touring comfort wasn't enough anymore; Nürburgring times became as prestigious a benchmark to a certain sort of buyer as golf bag-carrying capacity, and every range-topping luxobarge, no matter how luxo, also had to be theoretically trackable—or at least have a variant that was.

Into this poorly demarcated world comes the 2017 Mercedes-AMG C63 S

coupe. It's not just a two-door version of a remarkable performance sedan ("Extra Strength," April 13, 2015), though that alone should be enough to make you take notice. It's also the freshest take on what has been one of our favorite AMG offerings, and it's awfully pretty to boot.

Gone is the previous generation's brawny 6.2-liter V8. No getting around this: It will be missed. The 4.0-liter twin-turbo V8 that takes its place, however, is very good. It's a wet-sump version of the motor under the long hood of the AMG GT S, and what it lacks in naturally aspirated fury it makes up in 503 virtually

lag-free hp and 516 lb-ft of laughably accessible torque. All C63s get a seven-speed multi-clutch transmission (to refresh your memory, that's Benz's automatic with a wet clutch instead of a torque converter) channeling power to the rear wheels only. The car could accommodate a 4Matic all-wheel-drive setup, but there's no reason to mess with a good thing.

If the C63 S coupe has the makings of a wild machine, it does its best to hide it under decidedly mature sheetmetal and carbon. Even so, little of the series C-Class coupe's body remains; only the doors, roof and decklid have been carried over. There

are the requisite reworked front and rear fascias, but it's the wider stance—2.51 inches in front, 2.59 in the rear—that lends the car most of its visual drama. The form is functional: Widened haunches accommodate an AMG-specific rear-end setup, a wider track and meaty tires (255mm fronts, 285mm rears).

We'd like to say that the C63 S coupe clarifies things, that it picks a side and sticks with it, but that would be a lie. Rather, the new two-door attempts to juggle ever-greater performance with ever-more luxury and cutting-edge technology—and manages the feat with exquisite competence. But if this car represents some sort of philosophical compromise, it's not one we're pondering as we blitz Spain's Circuito Ascari in a lovely blue example under lovely blue skies.

Be careful with the throttle, our AMG GT S-wielding lead driver warns us before our first lap around the challenging 26-turn, 3.36-mile course, and don't switch off traction control. This quickly proves to be sound advice: Ascari is not the place to dive right into things without getting a feel for the tarmac. So we begin in sport-plus (one of five togglable AMG Dynamic Select modes), thankful for an expert to chase through the maze. As we build speed, we feel the car subtly, but insistently, correcting for our zeal—especially if we don't put enough confidence in the confidence-inspiring (and optional) ceramic brakes ahead of a corner or are too eager to get back on the throttle coming out of one.

We push a little closer to the limit on our second stint. A quick tilt of the Dynamic Select rocker switch puts us in race mode, and we're off again, driving ever faster and harder to keep up with the lead GT S. Even as we learn to trust the car, to let it enter the predictable, controllable slides it is so eager to slip into—this thing loves to get sideways, which is argument enough against the increasing prevalence of all-wheel drive—we head into a turn a little too hot, forget to mind that warning about the throttle on the way out and find the coupe's arsch rotating maybe a bit more than we'd like.

And that's when we are glad about the electronics waiting in the background (in race mode, fairly far in the background) to bail us out. With more time to learn the car and the course, a braver driver might turn everything off. A braver driver will be pleased to know that is an option. But the reality is that the C63 S coupe is simply a lot of car in anyone's hands, and as with its incredibly capable peers from BMW, Audi and Cadillac, there's more performance potential here than all but the most elite drivers can ever hope to fully wring out. It's the sort of car that rewards extended study.

Indeed, we learn a little bit more about the car from AMG boss Tobias Moers—after our time at the track, naturally. The paddle shifters aren't just there to provide the illusion of control, he explains, punch the manual transmission mode button on the center console and throttle mapping,





2017 MERCEDES-AMG C63 S COUPE
ON SALE: Summer 2016 **BASE PRICE:** \$82,000 (est) **DRIVETRAIN:** 4.0-liter, 503-hp, 516-lb-ft twin-turbocharged V8; RWD; seven-speed automatic transmission **CURB WEIGHT:** 3,803 lb **0-60 MPH:** 3.8 sec **FUEL ECONOMY (EPA CITY/HWY/COMBINED):** 20/27/22 mpg (est)



engine braking and more are reconfigured. Further, the car's brain will take parameters including lateral acceleration into account in the interest of coaxing "behavior more like a naturally aspirated engine" from the twin-turbo V8.

In theory, this evens out an otherwise abrupt low-rpm torque blast. So if, hypothetically, you put the car in race with traction and ESP totally off, the more linear power delivery and more precise throttle modulation afforded by manual mode should help keep you from getting sideways immediately. Another example of a space program's worth of tech working hard to synthesize a "pure" experience? Perhaps, but if it helps a skilled driver eke out that last little bit of enjoyment ...

In a reversal of the typical first-drive agenda, we get to know the C63 S coupe on the road after experiencing it on a closed course. With nothing to prove, we take a

sunrise side-trip to Gibraltar (you know, the big British rock a stone's throw from northern Africa), welcoming the mix of city traffic, expressway cruising and stunning, winding mountain two-lanes.

With no track-day adrenaline in our system to realign our priorities or to skew our judgment, we quickly realize that, yeah, the grippy sport bucket seats are pretty darn firm and, yeah, the adjustable suspension doesn't soften up a whole lot no matter the ride setting. The car is never harsh or unrefined, but there's a world of difference between the hot AMG car and the series model it is based on—something not necessarily as noticeable on its plusher S-Class cousin. We celebrate this differentiation.

In any event, the Mercedes performance coupe handles the day-to-day realities of the road better than its high-caliber rivals, tackling traffic with more ease than, say, the dual-clutch-equipped, sometimes-

lurchy BMW M4.

And when you get it on the narrow back roads and wind it up as much as you dare, the vicious roar of the V8 building to fill the impeccably constructed cabin, shoved back in your seat as you bang through the gears: Never mind the track—this is what driving is about, and the C63 S coupe seems built for it. You'll feel like you're getting away with something, and, in that sense, it's very much an old-school AMG.

Yet, even if you have a spare \$80,000-plus to burn, the purchase of a C63 S coupe should not be made lightly. It's heroic on the closed course and relatively comfortable during mundane daily driving, but don't be fooled by its composure: It's serious ordinance, an Alcantara-swathed autobahn-burner in the AMG tradition—glorious, stylish overkill on all fronts. With it, the sport/luxury line only gets blurrier. Not that you'd want it any other way. 🏁



2016 NORTH AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL AUTO SHOW

PRESS PREVIEW: JANUARY 11-12 | INDUSTRY PREVIEW: JANUARY 13-14

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All roads lead to Detroit. As the automotive industry drives into the future, Detroit remains in the driver's seat and NAIAS is the destination where next-generation products and technologies continue to make their world debuts.



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DRIVES

\\ DRAKAN SPYDER

Tail of the Drakan

FIRST DRIVE IN THIS
AMAZINGLY FUN
ROAD WARRIOR

BY MARK VAUGHN

 IF YOU WERE TO design your own “ultimate sports car” from the wheels up and the engine out, you might come up

with something much like the Drakan Spyder. Track enthusiast and former General Motors engineer Shinoo Mapleton not only designed just such a car, he built it. Now you can buy it, but it's expensive.

The Drakan Spyder has a tube-frame chassis with a mid-rear-mounted LS3 V8 driving the rear wheels through a six-

speed Porsche G96 manual transaxle; a double-wishbone pushrod suspension front and rear; and a 2,000-pound curb weight.

After one day in it on great roads, we can say it drives every bit as well as its spec sheet promises. Remove the steering wheel, step in over the frame, slide down onto the seat

and—fwooomp—you're in place for the six-point belt. Mapleton had earlier adjusted the pedals to fit our ungainly leg length (it's always a good sign when a carmaker asks for your inseam). Pop the wheel back on, fire the big V8 and we're off.

Immediately, we can tell this car is well sorted. Even





though the hip point is about amidships, we feel like we're sitting farther forward than if we were in an Ariel Atom or a Briggs Automotive Co. Mono. The forward seat location makes it feel like a race car. The unboosted steering is heavy at slow speeds but lightens up once underway. Brakes are unboosted, too, but give excellent feel. We get used to it and start to like it after only a short drive.

The engine is amazing. The 6.2-liter GM Performance Parts LS3 E-Rod makes 430 hp and 424 lb-ft of torque for an amazing 4.7 pounds per hp, good for a claimed, and undoubted, 3.2-second 0-60 time and a 165-mph top speed. Most cars like this—Caterhams, Ariel Atoms—have four-cylinder engines, but prospective Drakan buyers wanted a V8, so that's what they got. A powertrain like this weighs about 250 pounds more than a typical four-cylinder, but it is a tradeoff worth trading off.

"All my customers kept asking about a V8 just like their Corvettes or Vipers—which has a V10, but you know what I mean," Mapleton says. "So I said, 'Why not give it to them?'"

We feel the 40/60 front-

rear weight bias when we push the car in corners. No problem, though: We can rotate the Drakan around like a rally car.

The chassis feels rock solid, while the suspension is set up more for a real road, soft enough to absorb most bumps and potholes, but still stiff enough to make the car turn in precisely. The sophisticated pushrod suspension is solid, with only a little whanging over the bigger bumps. It's adjustable, so you can tighten it down for track days. The limited-slip diff feels a bit odd in the way it locks up suddenly, but you can't have everything. The Porsche transmission engages with ease and without ambiguity. The lever is a little longer than we'd have liked but is designed for a good feel/effort balance. Likewise, the steering wheel diameter, small and racy, is chosen to reduce steering effort while allowing for a quick ratio.

What would we have done differently? Maybe put a cooler-looking full body on it. This body exposes the four corners, so why not cover them up and make it into a pseudo-Ferrari? There's a fair amount of engine heat swirling around the cockpit



when underway—it could be routed outside the car.

All in all, we had a fun several hours' drive in this thing. We would definitely recommend it over the Ariel Atom, BAC Mono and even the Caterham, though a head-to-head between Caterham and Drakan would be a great comparo. Hmmm ... 🍷

ON SALE: Now
BASE PRICE: \$80,000 as a rolling chassis with no powertrain; \$100,000 turnkey with LS3
POWERTRAIN: 6.2-liter, 430-hp, 424-lb-ft V8; mid-rear-mounted, RWD, six-speed manual
CURB WEIGHT: 2,000 lb
0-60 MPH: 3.2 sec (mfr)



\\ 2017 AUDI R8 V10 PLUS

YOU LOOKIN' AT ME?

AUDI'S R8 V10 PLUS TURNS HEADS WITH SEDAN COMFORT, SUPERCAR SHEETMETAL

BY JAKE LINGEMAN



Q "WHAT THE HELL IS everyone looking at? ... Oh, right." That thought keeps coming back as we bomb across Portugal's back roads in Audi's new R8 V10 Plus, headed stateside next spring. After a few hours driving, it feels like a regular Audi; of course, it isn't. With 610 hp, the R8 V10 Plus is the fastest road-going car the company has ever produced.

Audi kept the original R8's design formula, only gently revising the front and rear—they're a little sharper and more aggressive now. The fenders are a bit wider, and the sideblade is two pieces instead of one.

The Plus' naturally aspirated 5.2-liter V10 raises the game 60 hp over the last model, with 15 lb-ft more torque—now 413 lb-ft—available at 6,500 rpm. The screaming powerplant doesn't cut out till a stratospheric 8,700 rpm. The R8

can sprint to 62 mph in 3.2 seconds, reaching 124 mph in 9.9. Top speed is 205 mph. The base V10—Audi says no V8s are planned for now—produces 540 hp and 398 lb-ft.

Power is fed to the four wheels through a seven-speed S tronic dual-clutch; it swaps cogs seamlessly and instantaneously. Shift times? We estimate 0.0 seconds. The company hasn't decided if it is adding the last generation's sweet, gated manual transmission, but we are keeping our hopes up. The V10 sings loudly but not in an Italian-Ferrari-opera way. It sounds more clinical, more synthesized, more tuned—more German. Gear changes and early liftoffs are greeted with a satisfying pop-pop from the dual exhaust.

Audi says the central diff can send 100 percent power forward or back, something we can feel when purposely



ON SALE: Spring **BASE PRICE:** \$190,000 (est)
DRIVETRAIN: 5.2-liter, 610-hp, 413-lb-ft V10;
 AWD, seven-speed dual-clutch automated
 manual **CURB WEIGHT:** 3,653 lb (est)
0-60 MPH: 3.1 sec (est) **FUEL ECONOMY (EPA
 CITY/HWY/COMBINED):** 13/22/16 mpg (est)



getting the car out of shape with the traction control either in performance mode or off. A little wheel correction, combined with the front rubber pulling, has us back in line in no time.

On smooth Portuguese roads, the R8 feels nearly as composed as a fast Audi sedan. Double wishbones at each corner keep everything planted, while the optional 20-inch Pirellis hang on for dear life. The chassis seems impervious to bad, bumpy pavement during braking, turning and acceleration. Even around unfamiliar decreasing-radius turns, it just absorbs undulations and keeps rocketing toward the horizon. As with the previous gen, the R8 gets the drive-mode select function, adjusting steering, suspension, throttle and shift parameters from comfort to dynamic. Performance, a new mode, is accessed through a checkered-flag button on the steering wheel, dialing back the traction-

control threshold.

Audi actually put all the important functions on the R8's steering wheel: The red start button is to the right, with the exhaust "loud" button. Drive select, navigation and—most important—that performance button are on the left. Audi's new virtual cockpit includes a 12.3-inch configurable screen that shows speed, revs, maps, radio and other important info.

We find the standard shell seats comfortable for everyday driving, even after a hundred or so miles behind the wheel. Audi also offers a full leather package that's a little softer on the behind. Neither type of seat has a height adjuster, but there's enough room to fit a driver with a helmet or, say, a really tall German.

After a few hours on public roads, we hit the 2.9-mile Algarve International Circuit for some full-speed laps. Here is our chance to throw the R8 around some. It's as easy

as the last model to drive fast. Hell, it could be the easiest supercar to pilot we've ever tested. Mechanical grip is confidence inspiring, only letting go when we get back on the gas too early while exiting a sharp corner. Pulling back on the reins sets everything right again. There's no fade in the carbon-ceramic brakes, though we only do a few laps at a time.

U.S. prices are coming closer to launch; the last V10 Plus cost \$173,500.

Audi knows R8s are special, and that's why it didn't stray too far from its successful formula. The company showed the first R8 auto-show car during the new car's event; it looked like it could have been designed yesterday. Couple that with both on-road stability and the comfort and ease to drive fast on a track, and there's a lot to like. Just remember, you're in a supercar.

And that's what the hell everyone is looking at. 🏎️



2015 RANGE ROVER SPORT SVR

SWANK COMES STANDARD

FOR A BIG BOX ON WHEELS, LAND ROVER'S RR SPORT SVR IS IMPRESSIVE

BY J.P. VETTRAINO

IF YOU'RE LOOKING at the fastest, most powerful Range Rover to date. It lays legitimate claim to the title "Most Capable SUV on Earth," if anyone actually bestows such a thing.

The 2015 Range Rover Sport SVR is the first car from one of two subdivisions of Jaguar Land Rover's new Special Vehicle Operations group—

launched with its own tech center in June 2014. SVO is JLR's captive tuner in the mold of Mercedes' AMG or BMW's M, but it is also much more. It can build custom-order bespoke vehicles, manage heritage through a new vintage workshop in Browns Lane, Coventry, U.K., and develop ultra-swanky, ultra-luxurious vehicles for serial production. The Range Rover Sport SVR is SVO's first vehicle to market.

The SVR starts as a Range Rover Sport with the upgraded 5.0-liter supercharged V8. Horsepower and torque increase 8 and 9 percent, respectively, to 550 hp and 502 lb-ft, thanks to a bit more supercharger boost and a Switchable Active Sports Exhaust, making the SVR sound more like a Jaguar F-Type than a Range Rover.

The SVR's eight-speed torque-converter automatic is reprogrammed to behave in generally racier fashion, and the adaptive air suspension is

recalibrated. Stiffer bushings help improve lateral acceleration 20 percent compared to the standard Sport, according to SVO engineers. A Brembo brake package adds six-piston calipers, and the SVR's wheels measure 21 inches.

They're the sort of modifications one expects from a manufacturer's captive tuner—and to good effect. The SVR sprints from 0-60 mph in 4.5 seconds, according to SVO, with a 162-mph top speed. During more than 1,000 development laps around the Nürburgring's



Nordschleife, the SVR turned an 8-minute, 14-second best lap. We found no reliable times for competitive SUVs, but the SVR's lap is quicker than published times for an interesting range of cars, including the Chevrolet Camaro SS, the Lexus IS F and the first-gen Porsche Cayman S.

Since this is a Range Rover, its air suspension still provides inches of ride-height adjustment. It comes with a dual-range transfer case and locking differentials. With 21.5 inches of wheel articulation and a 33.5-inch wading depth, the SVR delivers off-road advantages a BMW X5 M or Porsche Cayenne Turbo S can't match.

We get a taste of the SVR's potential at the Monticello Motor Club in New York, starting in the hills and fields adjacent to the racetrack—flooded to create ponds and mud bogs for good measure. With ride height maxed upward and transfer case in low, the SVR inches up loose, 40-degree grades and then back down. It crawls laterally across those inclines and over big rocks, fords water 2 feet deep and rolls through 6 inches of mud. It's only a hint of what the SVR might do with purpose-specific tires.

Then, after a pause to hose

off the mud and inflate its all-season Continentals, the same SVR pulls onto the paved road circuit at Monticello and flies ... a lot faster than anyone really needs to go in an SUV. You definitely feel the SVR's mass and height, but it still tracks unflappably at what feels like a full *g* through sweepers. The height actually makes it easier to hit marks and contributes to confidence in the driver's seat.

The default torque split is 50 percent front, 50 rear, but Range Rover says it has tuned a little more rear-wheel bias into the SVR. The front wheels tend to lose traction first, though the understeer is never excessive. The steering makes it easy to read the push, and it's accurate. The SVR is always controllable and consistent, and quite amazing for a big box on wheels. Whether a Porsche Cayenne Turbo delivers more pleasing transient response on a track, we're not able to say. The lighter Porsche Macan GTS does, and we're pretty sure that counts as an SUV.

We're less sure what formula weighs a slight loss in race-track performance against more capability on rocky hills or muddy trails. Maybe the assigners of "Most Capable SUV on Earth" have created that equation, but as we said, the SVR makes a solid case.

Then there's the midrange job SVR buyers are most likely to undertake: getting from place to place on freeways, boulevards and streets. Here, the SVR's air suspension never feels close to stiff. With the exhaust in its tame mode, it's quiet. The expansive greenhouse and commanding view keep the driver on top of just about everything, with dynamic response to react to anything—including pestering wankers in their annoying BMW 435is. There's a lot of space in the SVR, as well as true British swank.

The RR Sport SVR is on sale now for \$110,475, plus its \$995 destination charge. Add \$15K for all the usual options, and it's still \$30K less than the least expensive Cayenne Turbo S. 🦉

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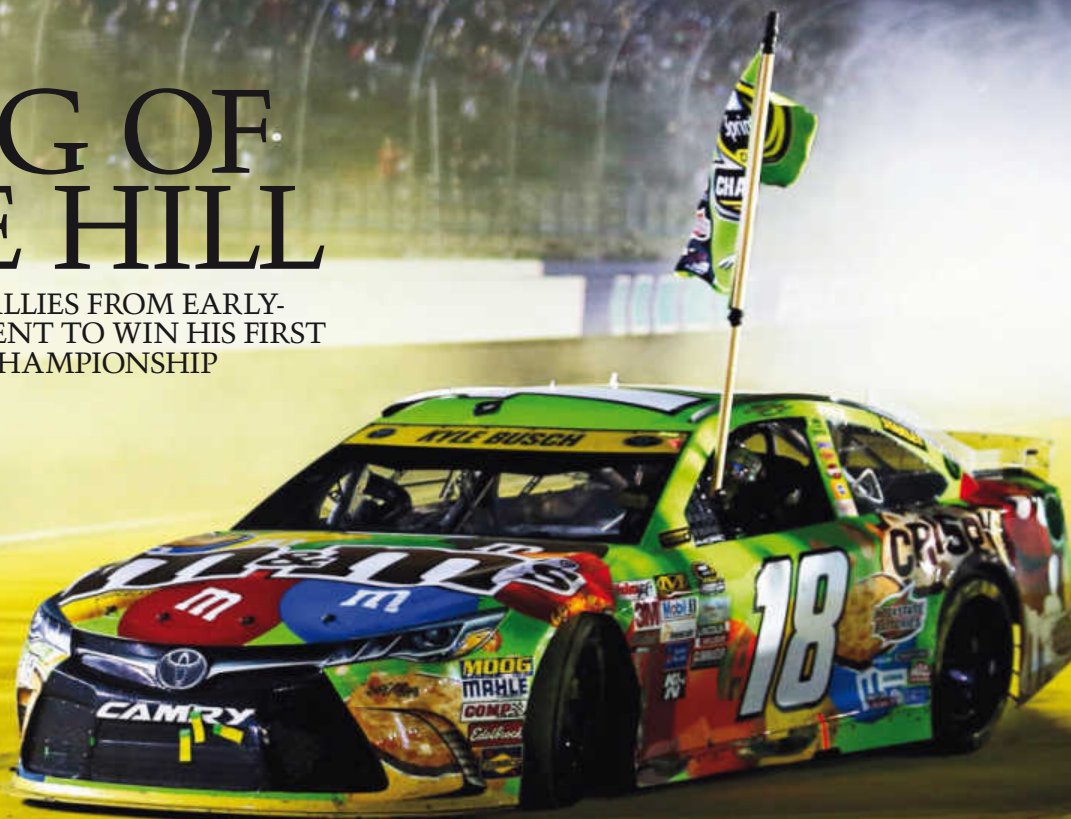
COMPETITION

NASCAR NHRA FORMULA ONE WEC

KING OF THE HILL

KYLE BUSCH RALLIES FROM EARLY-SEASON ACCIDENT TO WIN HIS FIRST NASCAR CUP CHAMPIONSHIP

BY AL PEARCE



GETTY IMAGES; LAT PHOTOGRAPHIC (4)



KYLE BUSCH IS THIS year's NASCAR champion because he and crew chief Adam Stevens and team owner Joe Gibbs refused to fold their cards when Busch mangled his right leg and left foot in a February crash in Daytona Beach.

While many NASCAR watchers all but wrote off his entire season, the 30-year-old Las Vegas native was determined to grind through rehab, therapy and the challenge of returning sooner rather than later.

He spent five days in a Daytona Beach hospital after crashing in the season-opening Xfinity Series 300. An air ambulance took him to a Charlotte hospital and he began painfully pushing himself in rehab sessions after a week at home.

"It was really, really hard," the new champion said after winning the Ford EcoBoost 400 and hoisting the Sprint Cup at Homestead-Miami Speedway. "I wouldn't recommend it. But it made me mentally stronger and physically stronger. I was

really worried at first because I didn't know if I'd ever be able to get back in a car again. In some of the first sessions, I saw stars and was ready to black out, but I was able to power through and get back."

Busch and wife Samantha had their first child, a son, on May 18, six days before Busch ran the Coca-Cola 600 at Charlotte. The early scorecard after his 11-race absence was erratic: two decent finishes and two bad ones. He found his stride in June and July, winning four times in a five-race stretch. He finished the 26-race regular season top 30 in points. He was allowed to compete for a spot in the Chase only after NASCAR granted him an injury waiver.

Disappointed at not defending his title, Kevin Harvick nevertheless appreciated what Busch endured to win the Cup.

"It's exciting when you race and accomplish what you've raced for your whole life," Harvick said. "I know that feeling and how gratifying that is. To come back from everything he came back from ... that's a great comeback. But you see that

little guy he holds, and it puts things in a different perspective. It used to be, you didn't want kids because it took the fire out of you. Now, it seems to have calmed down a lot of us to the point where we can focus and do the things we need to concentrate on our jobs. He's matured, but he's still pretty young."

Jeff Gordon and Busch were teammates for three years at Hendrick Motorsports. Busch was in his early 20s and marginally unmanageable at the time. Even so, Gordon saw the raw talent.

"I don't know if 'grown-up enough' is the right term, but his talent is so strong," the four-time champion said. "That team really found some things this year. He showed when he came back that there was a pretty good chance he was destined to win this championship. I see a changed Kyle. I've never talked to him and gotten into details, so I don't know why. But when he came back, not only was he driven and inspired, he was racing smarter, with more patience, being more deliberate. He came out of it better than he was before."

Winning Homestead handed Busch and his No. 18 Toyota team the Cup—his first, Joe Gibbs Racing's fourth and Toyota's first. It was just enough to beat fellow Championship 4 contenders Harvick, Gordon and Martin Truex Jr. Under NASCAR's 2-year-old, 16-driver, four-round elimination playoff system, the champion is the driver who beats his three rivals in the last race. Harvick finished second, Gordon sixth in his 797th and final Cup start, and Truex 12th.

The 267-lap, 400-mile race ended NASCAR's tough 36-race season. In the nine months between the opening 500 at Daytona Beach and the closing 400, teams raced at 23 venues in 21 states, going coast to coast four times and almost coast to coast six other times.

Eleven drivers won during the 26-race regular season that ended on Sept. 12 at Richmond. They included four-time winners Busch, Jimmie Johnson and Matt Kenseth; three-time winner Joey Logano; two-time winners Harvick, Kurt Busch, Carl Edwards and Dale Earnhardt Jr.; and one-time winners Truex, Brad Keselowski

and Denny Hamlin. They were joined in the Chase field (based on regular-season points) by winless drivers Jamie McMurray, Ryan Newman, Paul Menard and Clint Bowyer.

Shockingly, Johnson was eliminated after the first three-race round in the Chase—Chicagoland; Loudon, New Hampshire; and Dover, Delaware. (Menard, Bowyer and McMurray also were eliminated.) Earnhardt, Hamlin, Newman and Kenseth were knocked out after the second round at Charlotte, Kansas City and Talladega. And Edwards, Logano, Keselowski and Kurt Busch were eliminated after the third round at Martinsville, Fort Worth and Phoenix.

That left Kyle Busch, Harvick, Gordon and Truex as the Championship 4. Keselowski and Kyle Larson were poised for a classic late-race battle for the win until a debris caution with 10 laps remaining allowed Harvick to close on the third-running Busch and finally bring some suspense to the show. The last seven laps were a rout: Busch ruled the restart and easily beat Harvick, Keselowski, Logano, Larson, Gordon, Kenseth, Kurt Busch, Johnson and Hamlin.

The whole thing seemed a bit dreamy for Stevens, a rookie Cup crew chief. "I'd be lying if I said I had any idea what we've accomplished this year," he said. "It's been such a whirlwind. We had such high hopes and got off to a good start early in Speedweeks ... then Kyle had his accident, and the wind was certainly taken out of our sails. I was terrified he was really, really in bad shape.

"But he saw his way back through that and got us on the right track, and thankfully we had a lot of help from (fill-in drivers) Matt Crafton and David Ragan and Erik Jones, and learned a lot in Kyle's absence. We were ready for his return, and he came back strong. That's a testament to his hard work and dedication, and that got us to where we are today."

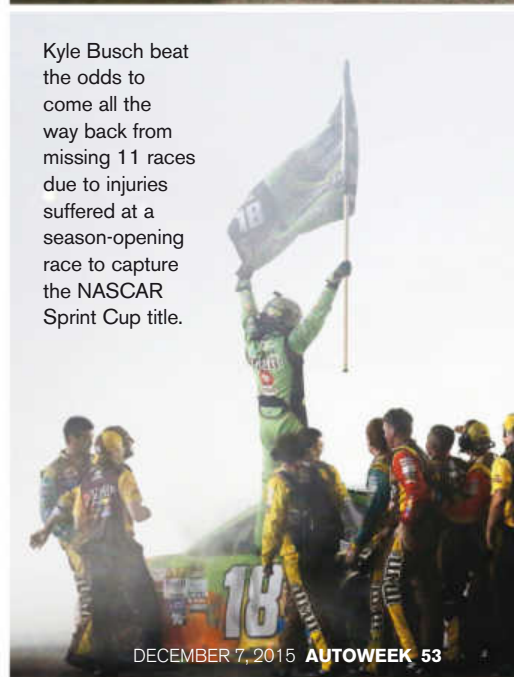
And "where we are today" is king of the hill, sitting pretty exactly nine months and one day after the February wreck that might have beaten down a lesser team. But clearly, not this one. 🍀

"I'd be lying if I said I had any idea what we've accomplished this year. It's been such a whirlwind."

—ADAM STEVENS,
KYLE BUSCH'S CREW CHIEF



Kyle Busch beat the odds to come all the way back from missing 11 races due to injuries suffered at a season-opening race to capture the NASCAR Sprint Cup title.



GRACEFUL EXIT

FOUR-TIME CUP CHAMPION JEFF GORDON FINISHES FOURTH IN SPRINT CUP FINALE

BY MATT WEAVER

□ EVEN WITHOUT winning his fifth Sprint Cup Series championship at Homestead-Miami Speedway, Jeff Gordon accomplished his season-long mission: Go out on top.

The 44-year-old Hendrick Motorsports driver finished sixth in his final career start, but it wasn't enough to catch Kyle Busch and Kevin Harvick—they spent the day racing for both the win and the championship. Although Gordon didn't win the crown, he bowed out in typical fashion, with both his dignity and grace firmly intact.

He walks away from full-time competition with 93 wins and four championships; he had a chance to add to both totals right up until the end.

"That was extremely important," Gordon said after the race. "That was extremely important to me."

Following a four-win campaign in 2014, Gordon had hoped he could carry

the success into his final season. Instead, he just barely made the Chase for the Championship and didn't win a race until Martinsville in October.

Fortunately for Gordon, the win came at exactly the right time, propelling him into the championship race. The No. 24 team had been on a streak during the playoffs, scoring seven of their 21 top-10 finishes during the final 10 events. So even though the first half of the season didn't go as planned, Gordon's winning a race and contending for the title in his final season left him very proud.

"I saw a change during the Chase and I saw it start to turn a corner, and I started to think, OK, you know what, there's still a chance that we can end this season by doing it competitively the way that I wanted to do it," Gordon said. "That doesn't mean that I had to win a championship or even compete for a championship, but I wanted to win a race at least, and I

wanted to show that I still have what it takes.

"I think the Chase truly showed that. I'm extremely proud of my driving and our team effort over these last 10 races. I think that that's something that is going to stick with me for a very long time, and how I made the announcement and how we approached the season and how we finished it."

Like many successful athletes, Gordon knew when it was time to go and wanted to retire several years ago. Instead, he stayed on at team owner Rick Hendrick's urging—he's the only car owner Gordon raced for in Cup.

While Gordon didn't exit as the champion, he did leave on his own terms—and nearly on top.

"The race was a struggle, but we fought through it, finished sixth, and I'm happy with the way it ended," Gordon said. "I am. I was happy to have a restart where I made up spots. That's something I can be proud of, as well as all the other things I'm proud of." 🏆



SECOND TO ONE

DEFENDING NASCAR CUP CHAMPION KEVIN HARVICK COMES UP JUST SHORT AT HOMESTEAD-MIAMI

BY MATT WEAVER

■ IN A CAREER OF LATE COMEBACKS to win races and championships, it's ironic we'll remember Kevin Harvick's 2015 season for his record run of second-place finishes instead.

The artist formerly known as "The Closer" finished second to race winner and Sprint Cup champion Kyle Busch in the Ford EcoBoost 400, falling just 1.55 seconds short of earning back-to-back championships.

The second-place finish was his record 13th runner-up placement this year, surpassing Bobby Allison's Modern Era (beginning in 1972) record.

The consistency, combined with three wins, propelled Harvick to a deep playoff run, but it wasn't enough to derail Busch.

"It's been a great couple years, and I know we're disappointed about finishing second tonight, but it's kind of the theme of the year, finishing second," Harvick said. "Unfortunately, it's just one short, but all in all, it's been a great couple years, and I couldn't be prouder of our guys."

Harvick led 46 laps early, but he just couldn't find a line to suit his temperamental Chevrolet. A caution with 10 laps to go gave him one more shot, but he didn't have the speed to catch Busch.

"Our car fired off good," he added. "We were able to go through traffic good at the beginning, but as the night went on, it seemed like the 18 got better, and we did not. We just stayed the same and never could fix the problems that we had." 🏆



LAT PHOTOGRAPHIC (2)

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MAKING A NAME FOR HIMSELF

CHRIS BUESCHER CAPTURES NASCAR XFINITY SERIES CHAMPIONSHIP

BY MATT WEAVER



FOR AS LONG AS he's been on Twitter, Chris Buescher's biography has read, "You may not know who I am, but you will."

Now that he's won the NASCAR Xfinity Series championship—on the day Kyle Larson took the race win at Homestead-Miami Speedway—it's safe to assume the racing world knows exactly who Buescher is and that his social media channels should soon reflect his newfound popularity.

"I may have to modify that a little bit," Buescher, 23, joked after clinching the title. "I may or may not have thought about that already."

Buescher established his racing chops as a teenager in quarter Midgets in his native Texas before moving in with Ken Ragan (NASCAR driver David's father) to continue racing in NASCAR's North Carolina hotbed.

The decision didn't come easy, though. He had to leave



Above: Chris Buescher (60) is firmly on the radar with his Xfinity title; bottom: Daniel Suárez won series Rookie of the Year honors.



his family and just about everything he knew to pursue his dream.

"Ken got to a point where he said, 'We want to help you. We'd like to see you make

this. I think you can do it. But you've got to move to Charlotte,'" Buescher recalled. "He told my family that and we just couldn't, I have two younger sisters out in Texas,

both very heavily involved in after-school activities. Their lives are out there. I can't expect them to uproot for myself.

"So Ken said, 'Well, why don't you just move in with us?' He said David just moved out and so I could take his bedroom and just keep up with the yard and make sure it's mowed and kept up nice, and he'll do what he could do to give me a hand."

It was there, with the Ragans, that he caught the eye of Jack Roush, who quickly signed Buescher to a development contract, and they've been winning races ever since. In 2012, Buescher gained his first taste of fame when he captured the ARCA Racing Series championship for Roulo Brothers Racing—a Roush satellite team.

That propelled Buescher to Roush Fenway and the Xfinity Series in 2014. Now Buescher has established himself as a NASCAR champion and the face of Roush Fenway's future.

Buescher doesn't know what division he's competing in next season, but he knows his Roush future is secure.

"I've been clear that I'm not in a rush," Buescher said. "If (a Sprint Cup ride) comes around ... then I'll do my best to prepare for it and be ready. And if not, we'll go try and double up on these Xfinity championships."

The season was also a coming-out party for Daniel Suárez, the NASCAR Mexico Series graduate who earned Rookie of the Year honors for Joe Gibbs Racing. Having spent the past two seasons running short tracks south of the border and in the K&N Series, Suárez proved a quick study to the heavier machines and aerodynamic nuances of both trucks and the Xfinity cars.

Suárez didn't win this season, but he came close several times and established himself as a future star in NASCAR. 🏆



KEEPING UP WITH JONES

19-YEAR-OLD ERIK JONES WINS NASCAR CAMPING WORLD TRUCK SERIES

BY MATT WEAVER

■ ERIK JONES FOREVER ALTERED HIS destiny in December of 2012 when he defeated Kyle Busch to win the Snowball Derby Super Late Model race in Pensacola, Florida.

At the time, Jones was a talented but relatively underfunded prospect from Michigan who made a handful of ARCA Racing Series starts but needed to catch a break in order to graduate to the highest levels of stock-car racing.

In winning the most prestigious Super Late Model race in the country, Jones created his own break, impressing Busch to the point that the Sprint Cup Series star signed him to a development contract to drive in a handful of Truck Series events for Kyle Busch Motorsports.

Three years later, and now Jones, 19, has become one of the most heralded prospects in all of NASCAR, having made a handful of Cup starts for Joe Gibbs Racing and secured the Camping World Truck Series championship for KBM on Nov. 20 with a plenty-good-enough sixth-place finish at Homestead-Miami Speedway.

Matt Crafton, the two-time defending Truck Series champion, won the

season finale, and Jones went on to a 15-point win for the championship over another up-and-coming star and fellow teenager, Tyler Reddick.

Even though Jones has already made starts in all three of NASCAR's top series, Jones said it was important for him to win the Truck Series championship and is looking to do the same next season in the Xfinity Series as he continues to climb the ladder.

"I think the Xfinity Series is completely necessary," Jones said. "I have no problem with running a year. I don't know what the exact career path is for me down the road, and at some point, I want to race in the Cup Series every weekend, and I feel like there's a plan in place for that opportunity to arise."

"Meanwhile, I'll just keep taking what's given to me every week and go out and try to win races."

From defeating Busch in a Super Late Model to hand-delivering him his first Truck Series drivers' championship, Jones has established himself as the future of the sport.

It won't be long before Jones is looking forward to battling Busch for the Sprint Cup championship, as well. 🏆



LAT PHOTOGRAPHIC (6); NASCAR MEDIA

ROLL CALL: 2015 NASCAR CHAMPIONS

FINAL STANDINGS, POINTS FOR NASCAR'S TOP THREE SERIES



FINAL SPRINT CUP DRIVERS' STANDINGS

1. Kyle Busch, 5,043 points
2. Kevin Harvick, 5,042
3. Jeff Gordon, 5,038
4. Martin Truex Jr., 5,032
5. Carl Edwards, 2,368
6. Joey Logano, 2,360
7. Brad Keselowski, 2,347
8. Kurt Busch, 2,333
9. Denny Hamlin, 2,327
10. Jimmie Johnson, 2,315

FINAL SPRINT CUP MANUFACTURERS' STANDINGS

1. Chevrolet, 1,584 points
2. Toyota, 1,516
3. Ford, 1,498

FINAL XFINITY DRIVERS' STANDINGS

1. Chris Buescher, 1,190 points
2. Chase Elliott, 1,175
3. Ty Dillon, 1,172
4. Regan Smith, 1,168
5. Daniel Suárez, 1,078
6. Elliott Sadler, 1,075
7. Darrell Wallace Jr., 1,071
8. Brian Scott, 1,032
9. Brendan Gaughan, 1,012
10. Ryan Reed, 902

FINAL CAMPING WORLD TRUCK STANDINGS

1. Erik Jones, 899 points
2. Tyler Reddick, 884
3. Matt Crafton, 877
4. Johnny Sauter, 809
5. Timothy Peters, 804
6. Cameron Hayley, 766
7. Daniel Hemric, 733
8. John Wes Townley, 730
9. Ben Kennedy, 690
10. Spencer Gallagher, 677



THE WEIGHT OF LEGACY, THE BURDEN OF PROOF

THINK IT'S EASY to follow in famous footsteps? Or maybe you believe that those who are the daughters and sons of someone hugely successful—in business, entertainment, sports... life—have a simpler path, especially if they want to do the same thing. You'd be wrong.

Comparisons and expectations are enormous and extreme, and only those who accept the weight of legacy—and meet it head-on—succeed. A name is just a name, but to honor that name with the best of your abilities is something to which you should strive. To do your best



at all times must be paramount.

That's as true for people as it is for automobiles.

This year, Derek Hill and Freddie Hunt, sons of World Driving

Champions Phil Hill and James Hunt, tested their driving prowess at the limit, and they did so in a car befitting champions: Derek and Freddie piloted Maserati Trofeo Cup cars this



season that sometimes wore Autoweek livery.

All three of these great names—Hill, Hunt and Maserati—performed beyond expectations.

Phil Hill was America's first world driving champion more than 50 years ago. A factory racer, Hill was a Southern California kid lucky enough and fast enough to survive and thrive in a sport where nearly half of

all drivers were killed while racing. James Hunt, who looked more like a surfer than a professional driver, gave no quarter pushing the limits of his capabilities and that of the cars he drove. As for Maserati, well, the Trident has propelled more than a few Grands Prix champions at circuits around the globe. It remains a performance car of the highest caliber.

The Maserati Trofeo Cup is a marque-centric race series that traversed the U.S. at iconic venues like Road America, Virginia International Raceway and Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca. The series tested speed, agility and tenacity, and the durability of cars and drivers from around the world; Trofeo races also took place in Europe and Asia as a performance test bed for Maserati's nimble sports racing coupe.

"The car is so easy to drive fast," said Hill, who has spent the last several years piloting vintage racing Maseratis. "The power steering and the brakes are so good."

Indeed, when the U.S. season was complete, all came away with a newfound appreciation for the power of Maserati. Hill, Hunt and Maserati each met the weight of legacy and the burden of proof: They were champions.

>> See video @ autoweek.com/maserati-legacy

DOWN TO THE WIRE

DEL WORSHAM WINS FUNNY CAR CROWN
ON LAST DAY OF THE SEASON AT POMONA

BY ROB GEIGER

□ DEL WORSHAM PROVIDED A dramatic finish to the 2015 NHRA drag-racing season with a title-clinching victory run at the Auto Club NHRA Finals in Pomona, California.

With record runs—and the potential for the accompanying bonus points—seemingly up for grabs every round, as well as a trio of rivals from Don Schumacher Racing applying pressure, Worsham finally got it done in a head-to-head Funny Car semifinal race against Jack Beckman.

"It's been an amazing day," said Worsham, a So-Cal favorite who lives in Whittier. "It seems like we had to run against record times every round, but the DHL Toyota Camry had the performance. The race against Jack was just huge, one of the biggest of my career."

All three of this year's champions collected their second gold Wally trophies. Antron Brown is now a two-time Top Fuel champion, and Erica Enders made it two in a row in Pro Stock.

Worsham's second title was different in that his first, in 2011, came in Top Fuel, meaning he joins legends Kenny



Bernstein and Gary Scelzi as the only drivers in history with championships in both of the sport's nitro categories.

"Kenny Bernstein, one of the greatest drag racers ever, and Gary Scelzi and the things he did, to even get my name mentioned with them is an honor I can't quite comprehend," Worsham said. "To be sitting here now a two-time champion, it's really something I may not have even thought was truly possible. I guess it is."

Having clinched his title two weeks ago in Las Vegas, Brown said his second Top Fuel championship feels more satis-

fying because of how hard his Matco Tools team had to work this year.

"People say to me, 'You guys only lost in the first round five times this year ... that's great.' I'm like, 'Damn, we lost in the first round five times? That's terrible.' But I go back and look and I don't see many places where we messed up and gave rounds away," Brown said. "Every time we lost, it was because the other driver beat us straight up. What can you do?"

"In 2012, I didn't think the competition could get any better, but it has every year. They don't give these championships away; you have to earn them."

Enders was feeling Brown's vibe.

"I didn't know how we could ever top last year's championship," she said.

"We've won more times (nine in 2015 compared to six a year ago) and clinched with a race to spare, but this one seemed a lot harder. Having that No. 1 on the door brings out everyone's best. You always want to beat the champ, and this year we had a target on us from the start."

Pro Stock will move from carburetors to fuel injection in 2016, and Enders is trading in her Elite Motorsports Chevrolet Camaro for a Mopar-powered Dodge Dart.

"The good news is we're all kind of starting from the same point with fuel injection," she said, "and I have all the faith in the world that we have the best engine guys and tuners in the class. Right now I just want to enjoy this one." 🏆



Above: NHRA champs on the podium;
below: Del Worsham on the track.



CHARTING A NEW COURSE

PRESIDENT PETER CLIFFORD HAS PLENTY ON HIS 2016 TO-DO LIST

BY ROB GEIGER

Peter Clifford was promoted to president of the NHRA on July 1, following the surprising retirement of Tom Compton, who had led the organization in that role for 15 years. Clifford has served in various capacities for the NHRA since coming on board in 1997. As president of the Glendora, California-based racing series, Clifford, 56, faces an interesting full season in the hot seat in 2016, including the transition to a new television partnership, declining car counts, combating the oil-down issue and determining a path for future growth in the series. Autoweek caught up with Clifford as the 2015 season wrapped up.

Autoweek: NHRA's new television package with Fox Sports was a nice way to start your tenure.

Peter Clifford: We think it's going to be transformative for the sport because it will bring in new viewership and higher recognition for our drivers and teams, and I think it's going to do so much for the sport going to 17 live events, with four of those being on network. We've never been on network TV in our history, and having four live events in the middle of the summer, I think it's going to be very, very exciting for the sport.

AW: Is it safe to say that the TV programs are going to be more locked into a time slot? There have been big complaints in the past when shows get bumped for other sports.

PC: We're really excited about our Sunday slots, which are

live—17 (of 23) of them will be live next year, with the goal in future years for more of those to be live. The Sunday slots are great time periods. Obviously, you're in live windows, so you may be impacted by earlier events, but I think that's less likely on Sunday.

On Saturday evening, it's going to continue to be a challenge for all sports because Saturday evening, especially in the fall, where you have college football and a lot of other sports going on, it's going to be a challenge. One of the things we are really excited about is, we are going to be experimenting next year with a number of shows going to Friday evening.

So, we'll have a one-hour qualifying show on Friday, which we think is going to do very, very well. We've never tried it before, but it's a better window for us and less likely to get bumped.

AW: With the immediacy of social media, are there plans to improve the NHRA app?

PC: Yes, definitely. That's one of our big initiatives. We know that the app has had some issues in the past, and we are literally, as we speak, working on improving the app so it's much more reliable. We are also doubling our efforts in the digital and social media area.

We are adding more staff to that area. It's very important, in sports today, digital and social, especially as we're attracting more and more youth. As we go live on television, that's going to be critical because that's the opportunity to interact with our fans during the television shows.

AW: Are there any changes coming up with the overall marketing of the sport?

PC: Yes, I think a couple of areas there. One, with us taking production in-house, we're going to be able to utilize all of our television assets across all of our platforms, including digital, social and everything else.



We'll be able to control the content. We're going to have a studio in Glendora (California), where we'll create content during the week and have a reporter here to work with the teams.

We'll have a studio in Indianapolis with a reporter and cameraman to be able to create content during the week: interviews, background stories.

Our whole idea is to show more of the drivers, get to know the drivers, get to know them behind the scenes, to create more stars because people out there can relate to our drivers.

AW: What strategies help combat the problem of declining car counts?

PC: The one area we have seen declines over probably the last eight to 10 years is in Pro Stock, and we rolled out the plan to address that a month or so ago. We are trying to make the cars more relevant, but also we want to attract more participation in the class.

We'll now go to fuel injection next year—which more people can relate to fuel injection—and it makes it more relevant to Detroit, the cars more relevant. And also we did simple things like make sure the cars get turned around when they come back into the pits to give our fans better access to the cars and the teams.

It is noticeable at the events when you walk around and see the crowds in the Pro Stock pits. It's night and day compared to before. It's so important to the fans because our sport is all about access. We've heard from a number of teams that used to participate that the changes we made might be enough to help bring them back into the Pro Stock arena.

AW: Peter, what are some things in the works—maybe five or 10 years out—that will keep this sport alive and healthy?

PC: Well, one of the things we are working on, one of our big initiatives, is improving competi-



NHRA MEDIA (2)

Racing at ZMax Dragway at Charlotte Motor Speedway. NHRA president Peter Clifford says getting to know the drivers will be vital in drawing more fans to NHRA events.

tion. And we already talked about what we are doing in Pro Stock, but another area that we need to improve upon for fan experience going forward is reducing the oil-downs at the track. It not only impacts our fans on-site, but potentially it could impact our fans at home with the live television. And we're working with the teams, and we have their commitment to address oil-downs and minimize that in the future.

We are bringing in new equipment to help speed up the clean-up process and we

are going to start working with a university on how to better clean up oil. And we have a commitment from the teams, and I am thrilled about that. That, to us, is a game-changer for the sport.

The other thing is that we want to get more people participating in the sport. We're going to be announcing a plan to do just that. Not only are we making it easier for people to participate at the entry level, but also reducing the cost and also reducing some of the requirements for people to participate. 🏆

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Can Nico Rosberg Challenge Lewis Hamilton in 2016?

MERCEDES F1'S NO. 2 FINISHES BEHIND TEAMMATE FOR THE SECOND STRAIGHT YEAR

BY ADAM COOPER



CAN NICO ROSBERG GIVE his Mercedes teammate Lewis Hamilton a consistent chal-

lenge in 2016—and ensure that the Briton doesn't run away and clinch the world championship early again? That has to be the hope of Formula One fans worldwide after Hamilton had things his way for much of this season.

In 2014, the pair was evenly matched on speed, and indeed Rosberg won the overall battle in qualifying. The title fight went right down to the wire at the double-points Abu Dhabi finale, where Hamilton won as Rosberg coasted to the flag with a crippled car. The consensus was that Hamilton was a very deserving world champion, but had Rosberg ended up on top, it would not have been an entirely unjust outcome.

We expected more of the same in 2015. However, from the start of the year, Hamilton had the edge. Rosberg admitted that he'd turned his focus a bit more to preparing for Sundays, and that seemed to cost him in qualifying as Hamilton won the pole in 11 of the first 12 races. Nevertheless, Rosberg won in Monaco after a strategic mix-up for Hamilton, and he also triumphed in Spain and Austria.





LAT PHOTOGRAPHIC (2)

That simply wasn't enough to stop Hamilton, who established his title momentum with a series of crushing victories. At times, he made Rosberg look like a supporting act, which was not the case last year, or indeed in 2013, when they were teammates for the first time. At one point, it appeared that Rosberg might even lose second place in the world championship to Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel.

However, in the last part of the year, Rosberg began to turn things around, and in some style. From Japan to Brazil, he took five poles in a row.

Converting them into wins proved difficult, however. In Japan, Hamilton edged him off the road on the first lap and he lost several places, and then in Russia, he retired early with a throttle problem. In the U.S., Hamilton again eased Rosberg wide on the first lap, but he recovered in style, only to run off the road in the closing laps and allow Hamilton past. That mistake clinched the title for Hamilton with three races left in the season.

Rosberg scored impressive wins in Mexico and Brazil. Had he shown that sort of form earlier in the year, we would have enjoyed a much more exciting battle for the title.

So why did Rosberg suddenly find qualifying speed—and subsequently the racing chops to stay ahead of the world champion? It's a question that nobody involved seems to have an answer for, and that includes Rosberg himself, Hamilton and the Mercedes team management.

Rosberg insists he was not doing anything different and that it's not a question of him being able to relax once the pressure of chasing the title was done.

"Unfortunately, I don't have an explanation for it," he said in Brazil. "What I do know is that I've been working on it. If I'm now faster in qualifying, then great, it seems that my work is starting to pay

Nico Rosberg tops teammate Lewis Hamilton in the Brazilian Grand Prix.

off. Because it was one of the big weaknesses, and definitely one of the reasons why Lewis won the championship this year, because that helped him a lot for

sure, to be starting first all the time."

Some argue that Hamilton mentally took his foot off the gas, without even knowing it, having won his cherished third title. It's true that he may have been distracted by some extra PR work and celebratory partying, but then throughout this year, he's made a point of busying himself away from the track. And no way would he want to somehow devalue his championship by being beaten, even in races that mean virtually nothing at the end of the year.

"Somebody asked me if Lewis has lost it a bit now he's champion," said Mercedes technical boss Paddy Lowe. "Absolutely not. I think you take one race at a time. People don't look at the scoreboard, they come to an event that they want to win. Lewis will be pissed off more than anything that he lost."

The bottom line is that Rosberg (13 career wins) is a very good F1 driver and is hard working and savvy in the mold of countrymen Michael Schumacher and Vettel. Remarkably, only Stirling Moss has scored more Grands Prix wins (15) without winning a title.

Rosberg might not be as exceptional as Hamilton—who by now deserves to be ranked among the greats of all time—but he's certainly good enough to follow his father Keke (five career wins, 1982 champion) and be a world champion one day. However, to do that anytime soon, he will have to beat Hamilton, and that means getting everything right, every weekend. It didn't happen in 2015, but Rosberg's late-season run has given him good momentum heading into the winter. The rest is in his hands. ☹



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LAT PHOTOGRAPHIC (2)

WORTHY WINNER

PORSCHE CLOSES OUT WEC SEASON AT BAHRAIN WITH WIN, DRIVERS' TITLE

BY GARY WATKINS

PORSCHE HAD TO work hard for it but completed a clean sweep of everything worth winning in the FIA World Endurance Championship in its second WEC season.

Mark Webber, Timo Bernhard and Brendon Hartley claimed the drivers' title with a fifth-place finish in the Bahrain final to go with the manufacturers' crown sealed at the penultimate round in Shanghai earlier in November and, of course, its impressive one-two finish in the 24 Hours of Le Mans last June.

There were times, however, when it looked as though former Formula One driver Webber and his Porsche teammates were going to fall short in the WEC's eighth and final round.

A problem with the throttle actuator—a mechanical part on the engine—hit the 919 Hybrid just half an hour into the race, and Porsche lost five laps to repairs. To compound the problem, archrival Audi



Top: LMP1 winner Porsche; above: Mark Webber celebrates his first world championship.

was posting its most competitive showing in dry conditions since Le Mans in June and looked like a genuine contender for the win. Its lead crew—André Lotterer, Benoît Tréluyer and Marcel Fässler—needed to deprive Porsche of the drivers' crown.

Lotterer led the race during the third hour. Had the No. 7 R18 e-tron quattro won, the delayed Porsche would have needed to finish fourth for its drivers to secure the title.

Such a lofty position for the Webber car looked unlikely

even before the throttle issues recurred in the penultimate hour and even more glitches arose as the finish approached. The good news for Porsche was the No. 18 car (Neel Jani, Romain Dumas and Marc Lieb) was in the lead and looked all but certain to keep Audi from the needed win.

Lieb got the better of Tréluyer early in hour four, and then an impressive stint from Jani basically put the result beyond doubt, even before the Audi had to make an unscheduled pitstop with a problem with a wheel nut.

Porsche had the faster car in Bahrain, at least in the second half of a six-hour race. Audi was able to take the fight to Porsche as it struggled with a softer Michelin tire and braking issues for the No. 18 car. Audi also opted for an aggressive fuel strategy, so the R18s ran lighter than the 919s in the early stages.

The Porsche trio in the 18 car ended up winning by 1 minute, 25 seconds.

It made for an exciting race or, as Audi Sport Team Joest boss Ralf Jüttner put it, “a worthy championship finale.” He was then magnanimous in defeat. “My second point,” he said, “is that there was a worthy winner.” 🏆

ROLL CALL: 2015 WEC WINNERS

**PORSCHE
COMES OUT ON
TOP IN SECOND
YEAR IN SERIES**

**WORLD ENDURANCE
CHAMPIONSHIP FOR
DRIVERS (LMP1 &
LMP2)**

■ Mark Webber
■ Brendon Hartley
■ Timo Bernhard
(Porsche)

**WORLD ENDURANCE
CHAMPIONSHIP FOR
MANUFACTURERS
(LMP1)**

■ Porsche

**WORLD ENDURANCE
CUP FOR GT DRIVERS
(GTE PRO & AM)**

■ Richard Lietz
(Porsche)

**WORLD ENDURANCE
CUP FOR GT
MANUFACTURERS
(GTE PRO & AM)**

■ Porsche

**WORLD ENDURANCE
TROPHY FOR LMP1
PRIVATEER DRIVERS**

■ Nicolas Prost
■ Mathias Beche
(Rebellion)

**WORLD ENDURANCE
TROPHY FOR LMP2
DRIVERS**

■ Sam Bird
■ Roman Rusinov
■ Julien Canal
(G-Drive/OAK Racing)

**WORLD ENDURANCE
GT TROPHY FOR GTE
AM DRIVERS**

■ Andrea Bertolini
■ Viktor Shaitar
■ Aleksey Basov
(SMP Racing/AF Corse)

RACING REACTS » The world was shocked and saddened by the Nov. 13 terrorist attacks in Paris. Many notable figures from the racing community spoke up on social media. We share a small sampling of their reactions below.

Shocked. My heart goes out to all those affected in Paris.
#PrayForParis

-Fernando Alonso, @alo_oficial

All our thoughts and condolences to the people affected by the killings organized by these monsters!

-Sébastien Bourdais, @BourdaisOnTrack

Qualifying 2nd seems so unimportant. My heart goes out to all the victims. #Pray4Paris

-Kurt Busch, @KurtBusch



My heart goes out to France and all of the innocent people affected by this horrible act.

#PrayForParis

-Will Power, @12WillPower

Praying for all my friends in #Paris.

-Jean-Eric Vergne, @JeanEricVergne

#PrayersForParis. I just don't understand the world we live in anymore.

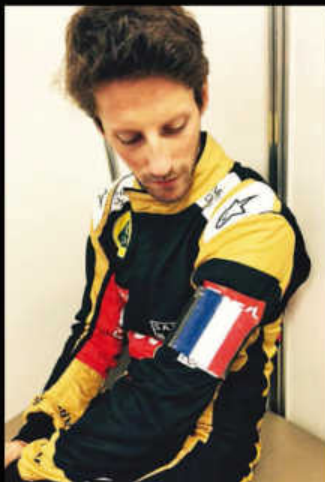
-Graham Rahal, @GrahamRahal

Speechless about the tragedy in France. My thoughts are with you.
#PrayForParis

-Nico Rosberg, @nico_rosberg

Heading into qualifying with a heavy heart. Thoughts are with everyone in Paris. God bless. #PrayForParis

-Lewis Hamilton, @LewisHamilton



Very happy with my racing, and above all, so proud to give everything for my country. France, Paris, I love you... #Paris #BrazilGP. Du Brésil on pense à vous, à #Paris... Vite la paix. (Thinking of you from Brazil, #Paris ... May peace be quick.)

-Romain Grosjean, @RGrosjean

**Courage à la France.
(Courage to France.)**

-Toto Wolff, @TotoWolff_Off

Watching the events in Paris is heartbreaking. God weeps with us. I'm sure of it.

-Mario Andretti, @MarioAndretti

Our thoughts and prayers are with Paris and all those affected by these tragic events.

-The Chase, @NASCAR

THE TALE OF THE ALL-NEW
2016 MALIBU

AS TOLD FROM AN ENGINEERING AND DESIGN PERSPECTIVE.

We sat down with designers Mike Pevovar and Crystal Windham, and integration manager Lance Johnstone to talk about the innovation that went into developing the next-generation Malibu.



Malibu Premier with 2.0L engine offers a GM estimated 32 MPG highway. Official EPA estimates not yet available.





MIKE PEVOVAR & CRYSTAL WINDHAM

EXTERIOR AND INTERIOR DESIGN DIRECTORS

In terms of design, what are some defining features of the all-new Malibu?

Mike: The Chevrolet Malibu has a road presence that balances form and function in a way that will turn heads. When creating the “new face of Chevy,” the grille, headlamps and daytime running lamps all laid the foundation for the expressive, windswept body lines. The design is assertive and confident, as emphasized by its solidly planted stance. Long, dramatically sweeping surfaces really make Malibu stand out from the crowd. The whole vehicle feels tidy and taut — something you could throw around a little.

Crystal: Malibu interior design is all about maximizing comfort with style. The instrument panel is down and away for more driver space, but the available touch-screen is up to 8 inches. We offset and slightly floated the screen to use space better. That’s pretty daring for this market, but glare and reach are optimized for a driver. Also, the softest materials are closest to the customers, and the details are outstanding — lots of inserts and accents of different textured leather appointments,

intricate stitching — it’s taking those expressive zones and adding more. We want to surprise people, not just the first time, but the second time, third time — like, “Wow ... they have this little pocket here for my umbrella!” and “Wow ... so this is what my car looks like at night!”

How do interior and exterior design elements of the all-new Malibu complement each other?

Mike: The extra 1.3 inches of rear leg room set the stage for exterior design — it stretched everything, so we used that to set up body proportions to make the vehicle look lower, longer and wider. Also, the sixth rear quarter panel window not only increases visibility and brings more sunlight inside, it helps make the car look lighter, more airy and more spacious from the outside.

Crystal: When you start with a solid exterior foundation with correct proportions, the interior design architecture comes together naturally, and we can focus on improving visibility and comfort. I always say the exterior draws you in, but the interior keeps you there. Drivers spend so much time in their car, so it should feel like a second home.

“We want to surprise people, not just the first time, but the second time, third time...”

Crystal Windham, INTERIOR DESIGN DIRECTOR



LANCE JOHNSTONE

VIRTUAL PERFORMANCE INTEGRATION MANAGER

The 2016 Malibu is quieter, offers improved mileage and better handling. How could you improve Malibu on so many dimensions simultaneously?

The key is integration — working with all of the vehicle components and vehicle teams simultaneously to create the lightest, best performing structure for the vehicle. The ultimate goal was to design Malibu with surprising MPG with less mass, but no reduction in performance. Integration allowed us to work through all of the consequences of using one part or another, and combining components. It allowed us to optimize more and compromise less, and it really paid off in the all-new Malibu. We were able to remove nearly 300 pounds from the vehicle — making it the lightest vehicle in its class, all the while offering an estimated 37 MPG highway!

What technologies aided in optimizing vehicle integration with the Malibu design team?

Computer-assisted engineering has progressed to the point where it allowed us to explore and virtually evaluate more design alternatives for the new Malibu than ever before. This gave us new insights by showing us how these alternative designs for the vehicle structure could improve performance across numerous different vehicle-performance dimensions. These internal structural improvements then paved the way for new external design considerations and possibilities. The engineering improvements optimized performance and mass, enabling MPG and also had an impact on the exterior’s great design.





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